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Poems: Alaska On My Mind / To My Mother For Loving the Rain

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DOROTHY MOSELEY SUTTON

ALASKA ON MY MIND

Silence so white I can't go back
to the Lower Forty-eight.
Everything seems so foolish there.

I choose instead to travel again
the long Haul Road from Fairbanks to
the Arctic Sea—July the one

summer month, ice cracking clean
as gunshots, nature at war. Ancient
water stratified, sediment

unsettled. Wind growls by turns
defiance and whimpering to be let in.
You appreciate what intervenes

to keep you warm. Sam wants to sell
the nuggets he has mined. How much,
I ask. How much you got, he responds.

Nothing I can imagine more fabulous
than what I see: ravens big as dogs,
the streams of the Koyukuk River brilliant

with blooming rocks—chartreuse, cerise,
crimson red. I tuck one into my knapsack.
The color dries and fades. Everything

begs to be left alone. To touch
the rock reduces truth to mere
words in a poem. What I like

about this place: that no doors slam,
but close quiet, serene,
in their own good time.

TO MY MOTHER FOR LOVING THE RAIN
(for Mary Swope Moseley 1909-1993)

Thank you for loving the rain,
For calmly, serenely accepting the rain,
Searching out the benefits,
Never flinching at the threats
Of Superhuman light and noise.
Awed instead by mystery
Teaching us to have respect, not to be afraid
Of tater wagon over wooden bridge,
Rumbling noise the thunder made.
Not panicking us through cellar doors
To huddle in silence and wait out the storm,
Affirmation's firm foundation
Enabling us to climb above.
When thunderstorms struck, we raced for the porch,
Snuggled close in quilted comforters
Against the rain-cooled air,
A part *of* the rain, apart *from* the rain,
Kind to ourselves.
When rain set in and lasted day and night,
We retreated to the kitchen
For the needed warmth and light,
Kindling cookie warmth against the cold,
Drowning out the thunder of the storm
With comb and tissue paper song,
In tune with soothing messages
Tapped out by the rain on the roof.

* * *

When thunder faded distantly away (it always did)
We stripped to bare essentials, close to the rain
Exposing skins to an element
Primarily familiar,
Which never lost its touch, and
We never lost our feeling for,
Testing it in every fiber,
Tasting it on tip of tongue,
Leaping and reaching and marveling

At Easter egg colors arched in the sky,
Breathing in the honeysuckle,
It, too, reborn in the rain.

Enraptured by the unreal green
Ignoring thorn and briar sting
Or cuts by rocks that had not yet come round
(Except for an occasional crying out,
As if slapped into life again)
So totally immersed we were
In feeling rain-drenched grass
Against bare feet.

* * *

You admitted that sleet was trouble, misery,
Even death, but I heard you go
Back to the kitchen window
Heard you breathe an ecstatic *OH*,
Look at that cardinal against the snow.
Thank you for loving the rain.

We were nourished in rain,
Learned our lessons in rain.
Moved to laughter, moved to tears
Moved to grow through unfolding years
Not angry, not resentful, not afraid.
Wanting to be touched, embraced by tenderness
But always gently braced, in case,
Against the storm, able to insulate and isolate
With quilted comforts, to stay on safe porches
When lightning is rife
But also able to emerge from quilt cocoons,
To immerse, submerge ourselves, bold,
Able to breathe the ecstatic *OH*.
And when the inevitable cuts and bruises came,
To accept also the pain
As a small price to pay
For loving the rain.